

Fully Accessible SKYWARN Spotter Training for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing NWS Huntsville

**September 13th, 2012 6pm-8pm
Huntsville Rehabilitation Services Center
3000 Johnson Rd, Huntsville, AL**



The Deaf and hard of hearing communities in the United States are larger than one might think. Gallaudet University estimates that as much as 14% of the U.S. suffers from some form of hearing loss. To put into perspective, the population of Alabama, as of the 2010 census, was 4,779,736. If the national estimate was applied to the state of Alabama, the amount of citizens with some form of hearing loss would total nearly 670,000 people! It is not clear exactly how many people in the United States are in fact Deaf or hard of hearing since the census does not require Americans to indicate that. Also, the definition of what is considered “legally” Deaf or hard of hearing is not clearly stated. Some individuals may retain some hearing while others are completely deaf. Regardless, the Deaf and hard of hearing populations make up a considerable percentage of our population and up until recently, have not been able to take advantage of services that the NWS offers such as NOAA Weather Radio or SKYWARN Spotter Training without incurring major costs for private interpreters or special radio modifications.

Recently, the SKYWARN Spotter Training Program has been able to adopt innovations in communication technology. The creation of the National Weather Service Facebook pages as well as useful reporting avenues such as Twitter and online storm reporting, have resulted in multiple ways “spotters” can report severe weather to the NWS forecast offices, including the Deaf and hard of hearing community.

The National Weather Service has partnered with the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services, or ADRS to provide appropriate weather training to the Deaf and hard of hearing community. In January of 2012, the NWS in Nashville hosted a successful SKYWARN Spotter Training for the Deaf and hard of hearing at the Nashville Chapter of the American Red Cross auditorium. This was a joint collaboration between the NWS, the Red Cross, and a local Deaf community outreach organization in Nashville called Bridges. After receiving very positive feedback from the Nashville Deaf community about this training, the

NWS reached out to other Deaf and hard of hearing communities in the region to offer this training in their area. The ADRS was quick to express their interest in having an even larger scale event in Huntsville, Alabama and partnered with the NWS in Huntsville to host a SKYWARN workshop for the Deaf and hard of hearing **at the Huntsville Rehabilitation Services Center. The workshop will take place on Thursday, September 13th from 6 PM – 8 PM.**

The workshop will provide the same training that is provided for the hearing community with a focus on the more accessible means of reporting such as online reporting and social media. The topics will include NWS weather products, such as the definitions of warnings and watches, Tennessee Valley severe weather climatology, proper reporting techniques, how to safely spot severe storms, and how to identify important cloud features in developing storms such as funnel clouds and wall clouds. With this opportunity to educate the Deaf and hard of hearing on important severe weather information, this underserved community will be more equipped with tools necessary to make responsible decisions and take appropriate action when life-threatening severe weather occurs.